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### ***All Roads Lead to Success for Small Business***

**MILTON** - Beth Thornton loves a challenge. Growing up in rural Wetzel County, her mother knew if she wanted something done, all she had to do was tell Beth no or that it couldn't be done and eventually the task would be completed.

"Challenges make life interesting," stated Thornton. "In fact, I sort of use the Nike's philosophy, 'Just Do It'!"

Thornton is owner of Thornton Engineering, PLLC in Milton which she proudly claims to be "the only all female engineering firm in West Virginia."

In fact, it's rare to find female engineers in what has been always considered to be a male dominated field. It's just that notion that led Thornton to become an engineer. "My first and foremost goal growing up was to graduate from college," said Thornton. "I was looking for an interesting and challenging career path which led me to the West Virginia Institute of Technology, who happens to have an outstanding engineering school."

Once graduated, Thornton went to work for the West Virginia Department of Transportation, Division of Highways (WVDOH) as a highway engineer and later moved to an engineering firm in Charleston which did a lot of work for the (WVDOH). The position however caused her to be away from her young family, traveling to and from Charleston up to two hours each day.

"One of the reasons I wanted to start my own business was to remain close to my two children," said Thornton. "I didn't want other people raising them or having to worry if something came up, it wouldn't take me an hour to get home."

After hearing about the WVDOH Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program from a friend during an engineering conference, she decided to tackle another challenge and start her own business.

Thornton felt that utilizing the DBE program to build up a client base would be to her advantage. "I knew that being a DBE would get my foot in the door," said Thornton. "And once those companies found out what a good job I could do, they would offer me additional contracts."

Hence another challenge then presented itself. "I needed to know how to finance my business, where to go and who to see," stated Thornton. "That's when I contacted Edna McClain at the Marshall University Small Business Development Center in Huntington who provided a wealth of information."

"I liked Edna right off the bat," said Thornton. "The first thing she said was 'Here's what we have to offer and what do you need.' There was no beating around the bush with her."

McClain provided her with assistance in putting together a loan package that was submitted under the U.S. Small Business Administration's LowDoc program, compiling an extensive business plan, help in preparing budgets and most of all, encouragement.

"Beth was really well prepared when she first contacted me," said McClain. "She needed some help putting together a loan request that would get her started and I guided her through that process."

Engineering projects generally take a great deal of time to complete and it is usually a year or so before payment is received.

"Edna really knew exactly the amount I needed in order to get me through the first year," said Thornton. "She estimated my cash flow needs the first year and it came out exactly as she said. It goes to show that the proof is in the experience when it comes to Edna."

McClain was also instrumental with Thornton Engineering receiving a Small Business Work Force grant that was used for technical training. "There are many tools out there to help small businesses and Edna and the SBDC is a great resource for pulling them together and explaining how to best use them," said Thornton.

Challenges are now part of life for Thornton. "No one can be successful in business unless they enjoy a challenge," she adds.

Things have been going great for the Thornton family now that mom is close by. She's able to drop and pick up her children from school and even let them play at the office at the end of each day. "I used to worry if they had lunch or needed picked up early due to weather," said Thornton. "Now, they're just down the road."

For additional information on the programs and services offered by the SBA and their resource partners, contact the West Virginia District Office at 1-800-767-8052 ext. 8 or by email at [wvinfo@sba.gov](mailto:wvinfo@sba.gov). You can also visit our web site at [www.sba.gov/wv](http://www.sba.gov/wv).

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